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ABSTRACT

This digest discusses the professional development of foreign language teachers at a time when the foreign language teaching profession is facing a number of new challenges, such as a rapidly changing student clientele, the development of national standards for foreign language education, and advances in technology. The first section of the digest lists some of the challenges that today's foreign language teachers are encountering. The second section focuses on the skills and knowledge that good foreign language teachers need, while the third section discusses ways for teachers to maintain and continue developing these skills and knowledge. The next section provides information on opportunities for professional development, such as programs offered by the federal government and by National Foreign Language Resource centers. The final section includes a number of recommendations for teacher education. Contains substantial resource list. (JL)

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Professional Development of Foreign Language Teachers

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Professional Development of Foreign Language Teachers

Joy Kreeft Peyton, Center for Applied Linguistics

The foreign language teaching profession today is faced with increasing enrollments and a shortage of qualified teachers. At the same time, a rapidly changing student population, nationwide education reform, and the development of national standards for foreign language learning are placing a number of new demands on foreign language teachers. Curtain and Pesola (1994) suggest that foreign language teachers today "require a combination of competencies and background that may be unprecedented in the preparation of language teachers" (p. 241) and that strong professional development is critical.

Challenges for Foreign Language Teachers

Curtain and Pesola (1994) and Tedick and Walker (1996) list a number of factors that make the teaching of foreign languages especially challenging and emphasize the need for strong professional development.

- The cultural, socioeconomic, linguistic, and academic diversity typical in today's student population requires foreign language teachers to work with students whose needs, educational experiences, and native language skills are very different from those of students they have typically taught. For example, some students entering foreign language classrooms grew up speaking the target language at home (see Valdés, 1995).
- The variety of reasons students have for learning foreign languages and the different ways they approach this learning require that foreign language curricula and instruction address a range of student goals and learning styles.
- The current emphasis on exclusive use of the target language in the classroom requires that teachers have strong language skills.
- The emphasis on thematic learning demands that teachers be skilled in the thematic areas explored, competent in the vocabulary related to these areas, responsive to student interests in various topics, and able to work in teams with content-area teachers.
- The emphasis on collaborative learning and student self-directed learning requires that teachers be able to act as facilitators, guides, counselors, and resources, not just as language experts.
- The increase in foreign language enrollments and the shortage of qualified teachers may require foreign language teachers to teach at more grade levels than they have in the past.
- The emphasis on technology for language learning and teaching requires teachers to keep informed about new technologies and their instructional uses.

Skills and Knowledge Foreign Language Teachers Need

In addition to demonstrating "competencies in the general areas of education, interpersonal skills, and professional education" (Met, 1989, p. 177), good foreign language teachers need the following:

- A high level of language proficiency in all of the modalities of the target language—speaking, listening, reading, and writing.
- The ability to use the language in real-life contexts, for both social and professional purposes.
- The ability to comprehend contemporary media in the foreign language, both oral and written, and interact successfully with native speakers in the United States and abroad (Phillips, 1991).
- A strong background in the liberal arts and the content areas.
- Understanding of the social, political, historical, and economic realities of the regions where the language they teach is spoken.
- Pedagogical knowledge and skills, including knowledge about human growth and development, learning theory and second language acquisition theory, and a repertoire of strategies for developing proficiency and cultural understanding in all students (Guntermann, 1992).
- Knowledge of the various technologies and how to integrate them into their instruction.

Some states have developed lists of the competencies that foreign language teachers should have, the experiences they need for developing those competencies, and resources that are available to aid in their professional development. One such resource for elementary and middle school teachers is the *Elementary School (K-8) Foreign Language Teacher Education Curriculum*, developed by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the Center for Applied Linguistics (1992). (See also ACTFL, 1988; Curtain & Pesola, 1994, pp. 245-250; and Glisan, 1996, pp. 73-75, for detailed lists of teacher competencies.)

Continuing Development of Knowledge and Skills

Foreign language teachers must maintain proficiency in the target language and stay up to date on current issues related to the target culture. Regardless of the skills and knowledge that foreign language teachers possess when they commence teaching, maintenance and improvement must be an ongoing process. In most states, teachers must continue to accumulate academic credits, while teaching, in order to keep their teaching license current. This can be done through evening courses, summer seminars, lectures, or workshops offered by professional associations or universities. Phillips (1991) outlines a number of formal and informal ways that teachers can improve their language proficiency and cultural knowledge, including participation in study and travel abroad programs, summer institutes and seminars, and informal opportunities that can be arranged locally (such as immersion weekends or monthly dinners where current events and other issues are discussed in the target language). Tedick and Tischer (1996) describe a summer language immersion program for preservice and inservice teachers of French, German, and Spanish to develop language proficiency and knowledge about current topics in the target culture, and to enrich pedagogical knowledge. Glisan and Phillips (1988) describe a program that prepares teachers to teach content in foreign languages in immersion or partial immersion schools. (See also Glisan, 1996, p. 70, for other descriptions of inservice professional development opportunities).

Opportunities for Professional Development

The federal government offers a range of programs for teachers' continuing education, including summer courses at universities,

funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, and projects in curriculum and materials development sponsored by the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE). The National Foreign Language Resource Centers, funded under Title VI of the Higher Education Act and managed by the U.S. Department of Education's Center for International Education, provide for continuing education of teachers on university campuses across the country. These centers create opportunities for K-12 and university teachers to collaborate and learn from each other throughout the school year and in summer programs. (See Zimmer-Loew, 1996, for a discussion of recent federal initiatives in foreign language education of students and teachers.)

Recommendations for Teacher Education

Even with all of these efforts, there remains a great deal to be done to ensure high-quality teaching of foreign languages in this country. Lange (1991), Phillips and Lafayette (1996), and Tedick and Walker (1996) make a number of recommendations for teacher preparation programs and describe initiatives that are currently underway. (See also JNCL, 1997, for recommendations based on a national survey.)

- Teacher education must shift from a focus on preservice training alone to lifelong professional development.
- Rather than separating language teacher preparation into different departments—English as a second language (ESL), foreign language, bilingual, and immersion—teachers should be prepared to teach in more than one second language context: for example, in both ESL and foreign language classes, or at both the elementary and secondary levels.
- Rather than beginning with academic coursework and educational theory and moving later to classroom practice, theory and practice must be integrated from the start. At the University of Minnesota, for example, preservice teachers are involved in schools from the beginning of their academic study, and they do their student teaching while they continue studying at the university.
- Teacher preparation programs need to expand their criteria for graduation beyond language proficiency and academic achievement alone, to include experience with different cultures in the United States and abroad, ability to work with diverse learners from many educational backgrounds and in many different educational settings, and ability to use state-of-the-art technologies in their instruction.
- In response to widespread teacher shortages due to high enrollments, teacher retirement, and teacher attrition, many states are granting emergency certification to individuals who meet certain criteria (a college degree, proficiency in the language, teaching experience, and pedagogy coursework). As a short-term solution, states need to make available professional development activities such as university courses and summer workshops to facilitate the recertification or relicensure of inservice teachers who have a foreign language background. In the long term, higher education programs need to encourage teachers to obtain dual certification: as elementary, middle, or high school teachers and as language teachers who meet certain proficiency requirements (Curtain & Pesola, 1994). Also, persons of color must be actively recruited by schools and university departments as teachers of foreign languages, a long-overdue change that has many other benefits in addition to addressing teacher shortages (see Lange, 1991, for discussion).
- Teachers in ESL, bilingual, and foreign language classrooms need to form strong partnerships that allow for the sharing of information, curricula, strategies, and support across disciplines, departments, schools, and levels. Partnerships also need to be formed across institutions. Schools, professional organizations, universities and community colleges, and local and state leaders all need to collaborate to enhance the quality of second language education in the United States.

Conclusion

Educational reform, a rapidly changing student clientele, technological development, and new views on assessment are just a few of the pressures today's foreign language teachers are encountering. If the foreign language profession is to provide first class instruction to its students while keeping up with a growing list of demands, support for high quality teacher preparation and continuing professional development must be given high priority.

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